



George Lane JR Staff Photographer

Sen. Frank Smith, D-Poplar, back to camera, makes his opening remarks for SB264 before the Senate Judiciary Committee, Friday in Helena. The bill would prohibit arrest quotas for peace officers.

Lawmaker alleges ticket quotas in proposing legislation

By SARAH COOKE

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HELENA — Montana Highway Patrol Col. Paul Grimstad insists his officers don't have quotas for writing tickets or arresting bad guys. Former policeman Sen. Frank Smith, D-Poplar, begs to differ, and he wants them banned.

Smith, a police officer for seven years, introduced legislation Friday that would prohibit all police agencies in the state from setting quotas on how many tickets officers are to issue or how many arrests they must make in a given time.

Smith told the Senate Judiciary Committee that he introduced the bill after three highway patrolmen complained to him about the practice in that agency. He said quotas were also discussed at a recent patrol meeting.

"There was a suggestion for change when I asked police

officers about it," Smith said.

Grimstad denied the use of quotas at the Highway Patrol, but said sergeants and officers do "work out a number (of citations) they feel they can attain for the year." The number has been one of several goals used in evaluations for at least eight years, he said.

"A quota is a set number that no matter what they're doing they need to attain that," Grimstad said. "We don't have one of those. This isn't set in stone."

Citation numbers can be adjusted in case of injury or if an officer spends significant time in court or investigating accidents, he said.

While Grimstad understands how it could be seen as

Bill at a Glance



Sponsor: Sen. Frank Smith, D-Poplar
Purpose: Would prohibit police agencies from setting ticket quotas.
Action: None taken.

a quota system, he said he's gotten no complaints about the policy. Grimstad, a 22-year patrol veteran, took over as patrol chief in June.

A handful of officers and law enforcement lobbyists attended Friday's committee hearing to

testify on a separate law enforcement measure, but cleared out of the room when Smith's bill came up.

Their quick exit surprised many committee members, but Smith expected it. He said he suspected they left to avoid questions about law enforcement quotas, a touchy issue which the industry has come to no real consensus on.

"I knew that was going to happen," Smith said. "I

respect them. That's why I stalled so they could get out of there."

Jerry Williams, a Butte-Silver Bow officer and lobbyist for the Montana Police Protective Association, said he left for another committee meeting and because his group hadn't taken a stance on Smith's quota bill.

"I don't think (quotas) are something being used out in the field extensively at all," Williams said. "I haven't heard any complaints at all about it. If our police officers have issues or problems with things they would bring them up at our annual conference."

The committee took no immediate action on Smith's bill, but at least one member expressed support.

"I think you're on to something here, given all the proponents and opponents," Sen. Gerald Pease, D-Lodge Grass, said, shooting a glance around the largely empty room.